

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of operating a gaming system having a central authority associated with a database and interconnected to a plurality of gaming machines, comprising:

establishing a player account in said database associated with at least one player;

providing a player card to said one player, said player card associated with said player account;

inserting said player card into one of said gaming machines;

identifying the start of a first regular gaming session for said player;

identifying the end of said first regular gaming session;

collecting first activity data from said one gaming machine during said first regular gaming session;

identifying the start of a first virtual gaming session for said one player

identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session;

collecting second activity data from said one gaming machine during said first virtual gaming session;

transmitting said first activity data and said second activity data to said central authority; and

storing information in said database based on said first activity data and said second activity data.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of transmitting occurs at two separate times.

3. A method according to claim 2 wherein said first activity data is transmitted at the end of said first regular gaming session and said second activity data is transmitted at the end of said first virtual gaming session.

4. A method according to claim 1 wherein said first regular gaming session precedes said first virtual gaming session.

5. A method according to claim 1 wherein said first virtual gaming session precedes said first regular gaming session.

6. A method according to claim 4 wherein said step of transmitting occurs at a single time and said single time is at the end of said first virtual gaming session.

7. A method according to claim 5 wherein said step of transmitting occurs at a single time and said single time is at the end of said first regular gaming session.

8. A method according to claim 4 and further including:

collecting third activity data from said one gaming machine during a second virtual gaming session wherein said second virtual gaming session precedes said first regular gaming session;

transmitting said third activity data to said central authority; and

storing information in said database based on said third activity data.

9. A method according to claim 5 and further including:

collecting fourth activity data from said one gaming machine during a second regular gaming session wherein said second regular gaming session occurs before said first virtual gaming session;

transmitting said fourth activity data to said central authority; and

storing information in said database based on said fourth activity data.

10. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of identifying the start of a first regular gaming session includes monitoring the insertion of said player card.

11. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first regular gaming session includes detecting the removal of said player card.

12. A method according to claim 1 and further including removing said player card; and wherein said step of identifying the start of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting the removal of said player card.

13. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of identifying the start of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting a game in progress on said one gaming machine.

14. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of identifying the start of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting credits available for play on said one gaming machine.

15. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting a completion of a game on said one gaming machine.

16. A method according to claim 1 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting no credits available for play on said one gaming machine.

17. A method according to claim 4 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting the lapse of a predetermined amount of time since the end of said first regular gaming session.

18. A method according to claim 5 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session includes monitoring the insertion of said player card.

19. A method according to claim 15 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting the lapse of a predetermined amount of time since completion of a game of said gaming machine.

20. A method according to claim 16 wherein said step of identifying the end of said first virtual gaming session includes detecting the lapse of a predetermined amount of time since the detection of no credits available for play.

21. A method of operating a gaming system having a central authority associated with a database and interconnected to a plurality of gaming machines, comprising:

establishing a player account in said database associated with at least one player;

identifying said one player who will play one of said gaming machines;

collecting first activity data from said one gaming machine during a regular gaming session of said one player;

collecting second activity data from said one gaming machine during a virtual gaming session of said one player; and

transmitting said first activity data and said second activity data to said central authority.

22. A method according to claim 21 wherein said step of identifying said one player includes:

providing a player card to said one player, said player card associated with said player account; and

inserting said player card into one of said gaming machines;

23. A method according to claim 22 wherein said step of transmitting occurs at two separate times.

24. A method according to claim 23 wherein said first activity data is transmitted at the end of said regular gaming session and said second activity data is transmitted at the end of said virtual gaming session.

25. A method according to claim 24 and further including collecting third activity data from said one gaming machine during a second virtual session of said player.

26. A method according to claim 25 wherein said third activity data is accumulated with said first activity data, and wherein both said first activity data and said third activity data are transmitted at the end of said regular gaming session.

27. A method of operating a gaming system having a central authority associated with a database and interconnected to a plurality of gaming machines, comprising:

establishing a player account in said database associated with at least one player;

providing a primary indicator in an active state at a first time and providing said primary indicator in an inactive state at a second time;

providing a secondary indicator in an active state at a third time and providing said secondary indicator in an inactive state at a fourth time;

collecting first activity data from one of said gaming machines when said primary indicator is in an active state;

collecting second activity data from said one gaming machine when said secondary indicator is in an active state and said primary indicator is in an inactive state; and

transmitting said first and said second activity data to said central authority.

28. A method according to claim 27, and further including providing player identification information associated with said player account at said first time at said one gaming machine.

29. A method according to claim 28 wherein said step of transmitting includes transmitting said player identification information.

30. A method according to claim 27 and further including storing said first and said second activity data in said database where said first and said second activity data is associated with said player account.

31. A method according to claim 27 wherein said one gaming machine includes a credit meter for tracking game credits; and wherein said step of providing said secondary indicator in an active state includes monitoring the game credits on said credit meter.

32. A method according to claim 27 wherein said one gaming machine receives currency; and wherein said step of providing said secondary indicator in an active state includes monitoring when currency is inserted.

33. A method according to claim 27 wherein said one gaming machine receives a voucher; and wherein said step of providing said secondary indicator in an active state includes monitoring when a voucher is inserted.

34. A method according to claim 27 and further including providing a cashless transfer to said one gaming machine; and wherein said step of providing said secondary indicator in an active state includes monitoring when a cashless transfer to said one gaming machine occurs.

35. A method according to claim 34 wherein said step of providing said cashless transfer includes transferring value to said one gaming machine from a removable device.

36. A method according to claim 31 wherein said gaming machine receives a player card; and wherein said step of providing said secondary indicator in an active state includes detecting the credits remaining on said credit meter when said player card is removed from said one gaming machine.

37. A method according to claim 27 wherein said gaming machine receives a player card; and wherein said step of providing said secondary indicator in an active state includes

detecting when the last game played remains uncompleted when said player card is removed from said one gaming machine.

38. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring an audio sensor.

39. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a visual sensor.

40. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a thermal sensor.

41. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring an infrared sensor.

42. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a motion sensor.

43. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a light sensor.

44. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring an end-of-game signal.

45. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a begin-game signal.

46. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a signal from a casino employee.

47. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring said primary indicator changing from an active state to an inactive state.

48. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a signal from a central authority.

49. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a magnetic card reader.

50. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring an optical card reader.

51. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein

determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a card swipe reader.

52. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a card insertion reader.

53. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a smart card reader.

54. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a biometric sensor.

55. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a fingerprint sensor.

56. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a thumbprint sensor.

57. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a palm sensor.

58. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring a hand sensor.

59. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring an eye sensor.

60. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring an iris sensor.

61. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring visual recognition.

62. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring facial recognition.

63. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring audio recognition.

64. The method according to claim 54 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises monitoring voice recognition.

65. The method according to claim 28 wherein said step of providing player identification information comprises transfer of identification information via radio waves.

66. The method according to claim 28 wherein said step of providing player identification information comprises transfer of identification information via infrared light.

67. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises magnetic sensors.

68. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises a central authority.

69. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring multiple indicators.

70. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises multiple indicators.

71. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said secondary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said secondary indicator comprises monitoring a period of time.

72. The method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises a period of time.

73. The method according to claim 27 wherein said first and second activity data is stored in a device associated with said one gaming machine.

74. The method according to claim 27 wherein said first and second activity data is stored in an account file stored in said database; and wherein said account file is also associated with a second specific player.

75. The method described in claim 74, where said account file is associated with a group of players.

76. The method according to claim 27 wherein a plurality of account files are stored in said database, each of said account files being associated with at least one player.

77. The method according to claim 27 wherein a signal is sent to said central authority when said secondary indicator changes state.

78. The method according to claim 27, wherein said first activity data contains a representation of gaming device conditions.

79. The method according to claim 27, wherein said first activity data contains a representation of an amount of player activity.

80. The method according to claim 27, wherein a signal is sent to said central authority when said primary indicator changes state.

81. The method according to claim 27, wherein said second activity data contains a representation of gaming device conditions.

82. The method according to claim 27, wherein said second activity data contains a representation of an amount of player activity.

83. A method according to claim 28 wherein said step of providing said primary indicator in an inactive state includes detecting when said player identification information is no longer being provided.

84. A method according to claim 28 wherein said step of providing said primary indicator in an inactive state includes monitoring the location of the source of said player identification information.

85. A method according to claim 27 wherein said step of providing said primary indicator in an inactive state includes monitoring a period of time.

86. A method according to claim 27 wherein said first activity data is collected before said second activity data is collected.

87. A method according to claim 27 wherein said second activity data is collected before said first activity data is collected.

88. A method according to claim 27 wherein said step of transmitting transmits said first activity data and said second activity data at separate times.

89. A method according to claim 27 and further including determining the state of said primary indicator; and wherein determining the state of said primary indicator comprises providing said player identification information.

90. The method according to claim 28 wherein said step of providing player identification information comprises monitoring multiple sensors.